

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6966

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, PLO

SUBJECT: SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON CRISIS

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 1959; (B) DAMASCUS 1993

SUMMARY: WHILE SYRIAN ROLE TO DATE IN LEBANESE
CRISIS HAS NATURALLY BEEN SELF-INTERESTED, WE AGREE IT HAS
ALSO BEEN GENERALLY CONSTRUCTIVE IN HELPING GOL GRADUALLY
TO RESTORE SOME SEMBLANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER. WE ASSUME--
CORRECTLY, WE HOPE--THIS MEANS SARG HAS COME TO AP-
PRECIATE DANGEROUS POTENTIAL WHICH INCREASINGLY UNBRIDLED
FEDAYEEN AWAY IN LEBANON CAN HAVE FOR MAINTENANCE OF
PRECARIOUS STABILITY CURRENTLY EXISTING IN ME. END SUMMARY.
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1. WE TEND TO AGREE IN MOST ESSENTIAL RESPECTS WITH EMBASSY DAMASCUS' HELPFUL ANALYSES (REFTELS) OF SYRIAN MOTIVATIONS, BEHAVIOR AND OBJECTIVES TO DATE IN LATEST INTERNAL CRISIS IN LEBANON. INTERVENTION IS OF COURSE INTERVENTION, NO MATTER HOW YOU SLICE IT, BUT SYRIA CASTS ITS SHADOW OVER LEBANON IN ANY EVENT AND SARG'S ROLE CERTAINLY APPEARS TO HAVE SMACKED MORE OF THE CONCERNED NEIGHBOR THAN OF THE BULLY NEXT DOOR. ALTHOUGH PRIMARY RESULT OF FONMIN KHADDAM'S MEDIATION EFFORT WAS AGREEMENT BY PRES FRANGIE TO REVERSE HIS DECISION TO INSTALL MILITARY GOVT IN LEBANON, THIS REVERSAL SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN DICTATED NOT RPT NOT SO MUCH BY SARG AS BY WIDESPREAD DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND ADVERSE PUBLIC REACTION--BOTH OF WHICH FRANGIE HAD GRIEVOUSLY MISJUDGED TO HIS OWN AND GOL'S DISADVANTAGE IN APPOINTING MILITARY CABINET IN FIRST PLICE. WE BELIEVE KHADDAM MERELY ASSISTED (ALBEIT CONSIDERABLY) PROCESS WHEREBY THIS MISCALCULATION WAS BROUGHT HOME TO FRANGIE BY MEANS OF PERSUASION, RATIONAL ARGUMENT AND PRESENTATION OF OTHER ALTERNATIVES--EMG., POSSIBILITY OF FORMING CIVILIAN GOVT UNDER RASHID KARAME THAT WOULD COMMAND FAR WIDER NATIONAL SUPPORT, PLACATE MANY OPPONENTS OF MILITARY REGIME, AND STILL HOLD OUT HOPE (QUITE SLIM, IN OUR VIEW) OF ACHIEVING SOME BETTER MODUS VIVENDI BETWEEN GOL AND FEDAYEEN.

2. WE JUDGE KHADDAM'S BEHAVIOR HERE TO HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY CONSTRUCTIVE ON SEVERAL OTHER COUNTS. WE HAVE RELIABLE REPORTS, WHICH SEEM CONFIRMED IN OTHER CHANNELS, THAT KHADDAM TOOK PARTICULARLY HARSH LINE WITH 'ARAFAT, BERATING HIM FOR NOT COOPERATING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH GOL AND RIDUCULING HIM FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO RESTRAIN ALL HIS FOLLOWERS, NOT TO MENTION HIS DIE-HARD RIVALS IN VARIOUS OTHER FEDAYEEN GROUPINS. (LEBANESE ARMY G-2 MAINTAINS THAT A MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF KHADDAM'S VISIT WAS TO ENSURE THAT SO-CALLED "MODERATE" FEDAYEEN LEADERS WERE NOT SUCKED INTO MUTUALLY-DESTRUCTIVE HOSTILITIES WITH LEBANESE ARMED FORCES, SINCE THIS--IN G-2'S VIEW--WOULD HAVE WEAKENED OR PERHAPS DESTROYED FEDAYEEN MOVEMENTS FUTURE USEFULNESS TO SARG.) WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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KHADDAM WAS SCATHING IN HIS MAY 25 MEETING HERE WITH LOCAL SUNNI MOSLEM LEADERS, ACCUSING THEM OF HAVING MILKED PALESTINIAN CAUSE FOR BENEFIT OF THEIR OWN SELFISH INTERESTS FOR YARS AND WARNING THEM NOT RPT NOT TO COUNT ON UNSWERVING SYRIAN SUPPORT IN THEIR PETTY, SELF-SERVING DISPUTES WITH LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. IN ADDITION, KHADDAM REPORTEDLY MADE CLEAR TO KAMAL JUMBLATT AND LOCAL LEFTISTS THAT SARG IS NOT PREPARED TO TAKE SIDES IN

THEIR VENDETTA AGAINST THE PHALANGE. (AS NOTED OUR 6840, HIS "UNDERSTANDING" WITH FRANGIE AND KARAME APPEARS TO HAVE PROVIDED FOR CONTINUED PHALANGIST PARTICIPATION IN FUTURE LEBANESE CABINETS.) FINALLY, WE WOULD HOPE THAT HELPFUL SIDE BENEFIT OF KHADDAM'S MEDIATION EFFORT HAS BEEN TO PROVIDE SARG A MORE ACCURATE APPRECIATION--REFLECTED BOTH IN KHADDAM'S BEHAVIOR HERE AND IN ANALYSES CONTAINED REFTELS--OF THE NATURE AND GRAVITY OF LEBANON'S CURRENT TROUBLES THAN SYRIANS MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE OBTAINED BY DEPENDING UPON USUAL PALESTINIAN AND LOCAL MOSLEM VERSIONS OF WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING HERE.

3. ANY INITIAL NOTION WE MIGHT HAVE ENTERTAINED--FOLLOWING STARTLING MAY 23 ANNOUNCEMENT REFORMATION OF MILITARY GOVT--THAT PRES FRANGIE AND GOL HAD FINALLY DECIDED TO EMBARK ON EFFORT TO ACHIEVE GREATER CONTROL OVER FEDAYEEN MOVEMENT IN LEBANON WAS QUICKLY DISPELLED BY AT LEAST THREE FACTORS: (A) OBVIOUS INCAPACITY AND WEAKNESS OF FRANGIE'S SUPERANNATED CHOICE FOR PREMIERSHIP, NUREDDIN RIFAI; (B) SWIFT DEVELOPMENT OF WIDESPREAD AND ADAMANT OPPOSITION WHICH FRANGIE'S DECISION EVOKED FROM MOST OF THIS COUNTRY'S TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS, PLUS LEFTISTS AND EVEN MANY NEUTRAL OBSERVERS; AND (C) OBVIOUS FACT THAT APPOINTMENT OF MILITARY GOVT COULD NOT RPT NOT SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER EXISTING BALANCE OF FORCE BETWEEN GOL AND FEDAYEEN (AND THEIR LOCAL ALLIES) NOR IMPROVE PROSPECT THAT GOL MIGHT EMERGE FROM ALL-OUT CONFRONTATION IN ANY SENSE "VICTORIOUS." IN SUCH EXTREMITY, OF COURSE, (AND EVEN SHORT OF IT), GOL LEADERS WOULD NOT RPT NOT HAVE EXPECTED SARG TO REMAIN ALOOF FROM INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS AND WOULD, IN FACT, HAVE PREDICATED ALL THEIR ACTIONS ON INEVITABILITY OF SUCH INVOLVEMENT. VIEWED IN THIS LIGHT, NOTION THAT MILITARY GOVT MIGHT HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO IMPOSE GREATER RESTRICTED

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TIONS ON FEDAYEEN PRESENCE IN LEBANON STRIKES US AS HIGHLY ACADEMIC.

4. WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY VIEW, REFLECTED IN REFTELS, THAT SARG HENCEFORTH IS NOT RPT NOT INCLINED TO SUPPORT FEDAYEEN WITH BLANK CHECK FOR WHATEVER POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES THEY MIGHT PURSUE IN LEBANON. WE ASSUME THAT MAJOR REASON FOR KHADDAM'S MISSION WAS SARG'S PERCEPTION THAT FEDAYEEN IN LEBANON WERE BEHAVING TOO PROVOCATIVELY AND WERE THEREBY ENDANGERING SYRIA'S INTEREST IN MAINTAINING A RELATIVELY STABLE, NON-INVOLVED NEIGHBOR ON ITS RIGHT FLANK AGAINST ISRAEL. IF THIS IS SO, WE HOPE IT MEANS THAT SARG HAS COME TO APPRECIATE DANGEROUS POTENTIAL WHICH PROGRESSIVELY DETERIORATING SITUATION CAUSED BY INCREASINGLY UNBRIDLED FEDAYEEN SWAY IN LEBANON CAN HAVE FOR MAINTENANCE OF

PRECARIOUS STABILITY CURRENTLY EXISTING IN ME.

5. IN OUR VIEW, SHOULD FEDAYEEN (SUPPORTED BY THEIR LEB-
ANESE LEFTIST ALLIES AND OTHER LOCAL SYMPATHIZERS) SUCCEED
IN SO WEAKENING GOL
THAT EVEN PRETENSE OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY
AND CONTROL OVER LEBANON IS NO LONGER CREDIBLE, FURTHER
AND MORE FAR-REACHING DISTURBANCES AND CHAOS HERE ARE
ALMOST CERTAIN TO ENSUE. (THEY MAY PROVE UNAVOIDABLE IN
ANY CASE.) IN THAT EVENT, WE THINK ISRAELIS MIGHT BE IN-
CLINED TO RE-EVALUATE THEIR OPTIONS AND PERHAPS BE SOREDLY
TEMPTED TO INTERVENE IN LEBANON, EITHER TO INFLICT SEVERE
DAMAGE ON FEDAYEEN OR TO DENY THEM POSSESSION OF THEIR
BASES IN SOUTH LEBANON. WE CAN THUS ENVISAGE SITUATION
ARISING IN WHICH SYRIA'S FEAR OF ISRAELI MILITARY PRESENCE
ON HER WESTERN FLANK WOULD BE REALIZED--NOT RPT NOT AS
RESULT OF SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON, BUT FROM
SARG'S FAILURE TO GAUGE ACCURATELY THE FULL IMPLICATIONS
AND CAUSES OF THE INTERNAL UPHEAVALS WHICH LEBANON IS NOW
ESPERIENCING. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN RECEIVING COM-
MENTS ON THIS ASPECT OF THEY SYRIAN-ISRAELI CONFRONTATION
FROM EMBASSIES DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV, AS WELL AS FROM
DEPT.

6. THIS MESSAGE PRESENTS OUR TENTATIVE VIEWS AND ASSESS-
MENT OF ROLE PLAYED THUS FAR BY SYRIA IN ON-GOING LEBANESE
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CRISIS. AS OUR RECENT SITREPS HAVE REFLECTED, POLITICAL
AND SECURITY SITUATION HERE HAS NOT RPT NOT BEEN FULLY
"STABILIZED." SHOULD KARAME CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE DIFFI-
CULTY IN FORMING NEW GOVT CAPABLE OF DEALING MORE EF-
FECTIVELY WITH CURRENT PROBLEMS, OR SHOULD SECURITY CONDI-
TIONS REMAIN UNSETTLED OR EVEN DETERIORATE FURTHER FOR THIS
OR OTHER REASONS, WE DO NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY THAT
KHADDAM COULD FIND IT NECESSARY TO VISIT LEBANON AGAIN.
FINAL JUDGMENTS ON SARG'S ROLE IN LEBANON'S AGONY MAY
THEREFORE BE PREMATURE.
GODLEY

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